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Council approves more money for civic building

Members also say they support more funding that could restore transit center design cuts by Agnes Jasinski | Staff Write

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An additional \$2.5 million to move forward with the Silver Spring Civic Building and Veterans Plaza project was approved on Tuesday by the Montgomery County Council, and members expressed support for additional funding needed to break ground on the Paul S. Sarbanes Silver Spring Transit Center project.

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The council also heard testimony Tuesday afternoon in favor of both long-awaited downtown Silver Spring projects.

'Our community in Silver Spring has been waiting for many years for both projects, and we look forward to their completion, and their completion at the highest level of excellence," Kathy Stevens, executive vice chairwoman of the Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board, testified Tuesday.

The council's Transportation, Infrastructure, Energy and Environment committee will consider whether to recommend at least \$16.72 million in additional funding for the transit center at a meeting on Monday. The council's Planning, Housing and Economic Development committee recommended unanimous support of the \$2.5 million in additional funding for the civic building at a meeting Thursday.

Both funding requests came from County Executive Isiah Leggett's (D) office. The first, to supplement funding for the more than \$91 million transit center, would pay for a number of items that came in over budget, including streetscaping, canopies using glass panels and an environmentally friendly "green" roof. The transit center, which would consolidate buses, Metro trains, MARC trains and taxis, would include residences and a hotel on the site, which will be constructed by a private developer, Foulger-Pratt.

The second request of \$2.5 million, which was approved in a unanimous vote Tuesday, will pay for "cost escalation of the last several years" in materials that would be needed for construction of the more than \$17 million civic building, according to a memo from Leggett. That project would include an ice rink and pavilion located at the corner of Fenton Street and Ellsworth Drive.

Despite design changes and value engineering to reduce costs, bids for both projects came in over budget.

The current design of the transit center reflects about \$3.4 million in design changes to lower the cost, said Diane Schwartz Jones, an assistant chief administrative officer in Leggett's office.

"In a perfect world, we would fund everything," Jones testified Tuesday.

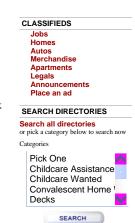
County Councilman Marc Elrich (D-At large) of Takoma Park said Tuesday that the council should go even further than the \$16.72 million and look for additional money to pay for some items on the county Planning Board's list of what Chairman Royce Hanson had described as "essential elements."

Hanson testified Tuesday that the pedestrian-friendliness and attractiveness of the center would be reduced with the design elements proposed to be cut from the project. Those include relocating the transit store to the plaza, eliminating all-glass panels in stairway and escalator

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enclosures, as well as taking away a canopy at the entrance of the Metro station and stamped asphalt sidewalks that have a brick-like appearance.

"They represent a small fraction of the total cost," Hanson said Tuesday.

Jon Lourie, chairman of the Silver Spring Urban District Advisory Committee, testified in support of Leggett's \$16.72 million proposal but added that the committee would look at the design elements in the project that had been cut at a meeting Thursday.

If the \$16.72 million in supplemental funding for the transit center is appropriated, contractors could break ground on the project by September, with 26 months of construction to follow, Don Scheuerman of the county's Department of General Services told members of the Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board Monday night.

Construction on the civic building will begin by the end of the summer and take up to 14 months, said Gary Stith, director of the Silver Spring Regional Center.

"Silver Spring's waited a long time for both of these projects. It's time to put the shovel in the ground and get moving on both the Silver Spring civic building and the Silver Spring transit center," Jane Redicker, president of the Greater Silver Spring Chamber of Commerce, testified Tuesday.

